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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 5084
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002336

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: BETHLEHEM FATAH DISTRICT REACHING OUT TO MEMBERS,
PREPARING FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 2296

Classified By: CG Daniel Rubinstein, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Bethlehem's Fatah District Committee is focused on reorganizing its ranks and improving outreach to district members, at least in part to prepare for future Palestinian Authority (PA) elections. Fatah should focus on restoring confidence and disciplining its members to avoid a repeat of its poor performance in the 2006 elections, in the view of Bethlehem District Committee members. The slow pace of the new Fatah Central Committee's (FCC) outreach efforts and reforms has been frustrating, but since November, FCC members have done a better job of communicating with the District Committees, and have reached out to the grassroots in ways the former FCC never did. End Summary.

BETHLEHEM FATAH DISTRICT COMMITTEE ACTIVATING
MEMBERS IN ANTICIPATION OF ELECTIONS

¶2. (C) Muhammad al-Masri and Yusuf al-Aref, members of Fatah's Bethlehem District Committee, told PolChief in mid-December that they have tried to capitalize on momentum generated by the holding of Fatah's Sixth General Congress in August to reactivate Bethlehem's Fatah members and attract new recruits to the movement. Al-Masri said the Bethlehem district has 1,500 active supporters, although only 1,100 are registered members. He also noted that Fatah branches around the Bethlehem Governorate are holding monthly meetings to discuss elections and organization. Al-Masri touted the findings of a recent National Democratic Institute (NDI) report that said the Bethlehem district is better organized and has better outreach to members than other Fatah district committees in the West Bank.

¶3. (C) Al-Masri and al-Aref said that Fatah in the Bethlehem district is preparing for PA elections, despite the uncertainty over when those elections will be held. Al-Masri said Fatah leaders have not yet decided how to select electoral candidates. Fatah is considering holding primaries, he said, but appointing candidates is still an option. Al-Masri and al-Aref said that Fatah's priorities should be restoring confidence in the movement and disciplining its members, if the movement wants to perform well in future elections.

¶4. (C) Al-Masri noted that as many as 450 senior and mid-level Fatah members in the Bethlehem district were sidelined and alienated by the August Fatah General Congress proceedings. Fatah local leaders and the FCC are watching these people and other politically independent public figures

closely, al-Masri said, although he admitted that they have no strategy to prevent them from drawing votes away from official Fatah candidates during elections.

FCC OFF TO A SLOW START, BUT IMPROVING ITS OUTREACH

15. (C) Al-Masri said he was frustrated by the initially slow pace of activity initiated by the FCC. FCC members did not reach out to the district committees until three months after the Congress, he said. He was critical of the delay, but noted optimistically that since November, FCC members have maintained consistent communication with the district committees and have even reached out to the grassroots. For example, he noted, senior Fatah leaders Muhammad al-Madani, Saeb Erekat, Muhammad Dahlan, and Mahmud al-Alul all spoke at a Fatah Youth Movement rally in Jericho in early December, and al-Madani spoke again to Bethlehem Fatah activists later in the month. Al-Masri also commented on Fatah's poor financial situation, saying that he often found it necessary to borrow money or materials from the Palestinian Authority (PA) for Bethlehem District Committee activities.

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